

Amendments to the Claims

Please cancel claims 1-3 and add new claims 4-10 as indicated in the following listing of claims which will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

Claims 1-3 (Cancelled)

4. (New) An air-curtain forming apparatus to be attached to a semiconductor-fabrication equipment of a minienvironment system, in which system a wafer is conveyed by a wafer hermetic container to the semiconductor-fabrication equipment equipped with a wafer carrying-in opening, comprising:

an annular case to be attached to a periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening, the case having a slit for injecting air forwardly;

an annular air filter tube disposed in the case, the air filter tube having a circular cross section;

an air-supply means for supplying an airflow into the annular air filter tube so that the airflow passes through the air filter tube and is injected from the slit; and

an air-supply tube for connecting the air-supply means and the air filter tube in fluid communication,

thereby forming an air curtain of clean air that has passed the annular air filter tube, between a periphery of an opened opening of the hermetic container and a periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening to prevent ambient air from entering the opened opening of the hermetic container when the hermetic container, which is located in front of the wafer carrying-in opening of the semiconductor fabrication device, is opened.

5. (New) The air-curtain forming apparatus of claim 4, including a guide plate for directing the clean air that has passed the air filter tube.

6. (New) The air-curtain forming apparatus of claim 4, wherein the air-supply tube is attached to a front panel of the semiconductor-fabrication equipment, and wherein the annular case is disposed in a notch formed in the front panel at the periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening formed in the front panel.

7. (New) An air-curtain forming apparatus to be attached to a semiconductor-fabrication equipment of a minienvironment system, in which system a wafer is conveyed by a wafer hermetic container to the semiconductor-fabrication equipment equipped with a wafer carrying-in opening, comprising:

- an annular case to be attached to a periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening, the case having a slit for injecting air forwardly;

- an annular air filter tube disposed in the case, the air filter tube having a circular cross section;

- an air-supply means for supplying an airflow into the annular air filter tube so that the airflow passes through the air filter tube and is injected from the slit; and

- an air-supply tube for connecting the air-supply means and the air filter tube in fluid communication,

thereby forming an air curtain of clean air that has passed the annular air filter tube, between a periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening and a periphery of an opened opening of one hermetic container located in front of the wafer carrying-in opening to prevent ambient air from entering the opening of said hermetic container when the opening of said hermetic container, is opened.

8. (New) The air-curtain forming apparatus of claim 7, including a guide plate for directing the clean air that has passed the air filter tube.

9. (New) The air-curtain forming apparatus of claim 7, wherein the air-supply tube is attached to a front panel of the semiconductor-fabrication equipment, and wherein the annular case is disposed in a notch formed in the front panel at the periphery of the wafer carrying-in opening formed in the front panel.

10. (New) An air curtain forming apparatus for attachment to a semiconductor fabrication equipment, the semiconductor fabrication equipment having an opening that permits a wafer to be transferred to or from a hermetic container, the air curtain forming apparatus comprising:

- cylindrically shaped filters connected to each other, one filter having an air supply tube;

- a filter case forming a rectangular frame and encasing the cylindrically shaped filters, the filter case having a front opening and an aperture wherein the air supply tube passes through the aperture; and

- a guide cover having an injection slit and a guide slit, the guide cover removably mounted on the filter case at its front opening,

- such that air supplied to the air supply tube passes through the injection slit and is ejected from the apparatus through the guide slit forming an air curtain at a gap between the opening and a gateway of the hermetic container to prevent ambient air from entering the hermetic container when the hermetic container is opened.